Who Do We Tell and Whom Do We Tell On? Gossip as a Strategy for Status Enhancement[1]

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College students ranked the interest value of 12 different gossip scenarios; likelihood of spreading the gossip; and the people to whom they would be most likely to tell the gossip, depending on whether the gossip was about male or female professors, relatives, friends, acquaintances, strangers, or a same-sex rival or a romantic partner. Damaging, negative news about rivals and positive news about friends and lovers was especially prized and likely to be passed on. Aside from romantic partners, males and females were more interested in information about same-sex others than about opposite-sex others. Overall, men were most likely to confide in their romantic partners, but females were equally likely to share gossip with their lovers and their same-sex friends.

The universally important role played by gossip in human groups has led many researchers to propose that a human propensity for gossip is an evolved psychological adaptation that enabled individuals to be socially successful in our ancestral environments (Barkow, 1989, 1992; Dunbar, 1996; McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000). Most research on gossip conducted from an evolutionary perspective has emphasized the social control function played by gossip in the life of groups. Specifically, gossip can be an efficient way to remind group members of the importance of the group's norms and values; an effective deterrent to deviance; and a tool for punishing those who transgress (Barkow, 1992; Levin & Arluke, 1987; Merry, 1984).

Research is suggesting increasingly that being able to effectively deal with cheaters is probably the dominant driving force in the evolution of much of our social behavior. For example, the emotional and behavioral reactions

that individuals display in response to violations of social norms are exactly what would be expected if these responses were the product of adaptations that have evolved to facilitate within-group cooperation (O'Gorman, Wilson, & Miller, 2005; Wilson & O'Gorman, 2003). In their most extreme forms, these responses might even be characterized as altruistic punishment in which a desire to see cheaters punished leads some individuals to be so motivated to carry out such punishment that they are willing to do so even at great personal expense (O'Gorman et al., 2005). Such behaviors are explained most easily by a multilevel selection perspective in which adaptive behaviors evolve because they have been selected for at many levels, ranging from genes through social groups (Wilson, 1997a, 1997b). Thus, many social behaviors exist because they serve a range of both individual and group purposes. The predisposition to gossip seems to be one such adaptation.

Gossip can be an effective way to uncover information about *cheaters* (i.e., those who fail to reciprocate altruistic acts adequately) and to control their behavior for the ultimate well-being of the group as a whole (Dunbar, 1996; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Wilson et al., 2000). Studies in real-life groups, such as California cattle ranchers (Ellickson, 1991), Maine lobster fishermen (Acheson, 1988), and college rowing teams (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) have confirmed that gossip is used in these quite different settings to enforce group norms when individuals fail to live up to the group's expectations. Anthropological studies of hunter–gatherer societies have typically revealed a similar social-control function for gossip in these societies (Lee, 1990; McPherson, 1991). In keeping with these findings, Wilson et al. found that gossip that occurs in response to violation of a social norm is judged much less harshly than is self-serving gossip. Specifically, they found that gossip about others who break the rules and violate a group's social norms harms the target more than the speaker, but that blatantly self-serving gossip harms the speaker more than the target.

Boehm (1999) further proposed that gossip could serve as a leveling mechanism for neutralizing the dominance tendencies of others who might attempt to compromise the interests of the group. Boehm believed that small-scale foraging societies, such as those typical during human prehistory, emphasized an egalitarianism that suppressed internal competition and promoted consensus-seeking in a way that reduced within-group differences in the selection process. These social pressures discouraged free riders and cheaters and encouraged altruists (Boehm, 1997). Boehm (1993) also proposed that such egalitarian societies were necessary because of the relatively equal and unstable balance of power among individuals with access to weapons and shifting coalitions. In these societies, the manipulation of public opinion through gossip, ridicule, and ostracism became a key way to keep potentially dominant group members in check.

In general, people do not seem to be very disturbed about this well established, socially beneficial type of gossip. However, an aspect of gossip that is troubling to many is that it is not just a mechanism used by groups to enforce conformity, but that it can also be a strategy used by individuals to further their own reputations and selfish interests at the expense of others (Dunbar, 1996; Emler, 1994; Spacks, 1985). When examined in the light of competition between people in the same social group, gossip is very much about enhancing one's own success in social competition (Barkow, 1989).

Gossip offers a means of manipulating others' reputations by passing on negative information about competitors or enemies, as well as a means of detecting betrayal by others in our important relationships (Shackelford, 1997; Spacks, 1985). According to Barkow (1992), we should be especially interested in information about people who matter most in our lives: rivals, mates, relatives, partners in social exchange, and high-ranking people whose behavior can affect us. Barkow also proposed that the type of information that we seek should be information that can affect our social standing relative to others. Hence, information about control of resources (e.g., financial news); sexual activity; current alliances and political dealings; and an individual's reputation as a reliable, trustworthy partner in social exchange will be especially interesting to us. Similarly, gossip about members of our own social group (as opposed to strangers or out-group members) should be interesting primarily because of its role in uncovering cheater or trustworthy tendencies in people with whom we must deal on a regular basis.

All of these speculations about the within-group competitive advantages of gossip make sense and are consistent with evolutionary thinking. However, while there have been many studies documenting the social-control functions of gossip, there has been very little empirical evidence that gossip does in fact function to promote selfish individual interests. Hypotheses about what one should find are easy to generate. Given the proposition that gossip exists as a way of acquiring fitness-enhancing information, it would be predicted that individuals would be most interested in information that could be exploited for social gain. Hence, we would expect to find higher interest in negative information (e.g., misfortunes, scandals) about high-status people and potential rivals since this would be something that might be exploited. Negative information about those lower than us in status would not be as useful. There should also be less interest in passing along negative information about our allies (i.e., friends, relatives) than about people who are not allies. Conversely, positive information (good fortune, sudden elevation of status) about allies should be very likely to be spread around, while positive information about non-allies should be less interesting because it is not very useful in advancing one's own interests.

For a variety of reasons, our interest in the doings of same-sex others ought to be especially strong. Wilson and Daly (1996), among others, have identified same-sex members of one's own species as our principal evolutionary competitors. Shackelford (1997) has verified the cross-culturally universal importance of same-sex friendships and coalitional relationships. According to Shackelford, managing alliances and friendships has posed important adaptive problems throughout human history because it is important to evaluate the quality and intentions of one's allies and rivals if one is to be successful. Given how critical such relationships are in all areas of life, and also given that such relationships would be most likely to exist between members of same-aged cohorts, we should be most interested in gossip about other people of the same sex who are close to us in age. Interest about members of the other sex should be very strong only when their age and situational circumstances would make them appropriate as mates.

McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002) obtained support for many of these predictions about the selfish function of gossip in two studies. In one study, 128 people between the ages of 17 and 62 were asked to quickly arrange 12 articles about celebrities taken from tabloids published in Autumn 1996 according to how interesting they found the articles and how much they would like to read them. It was found that people consistently found stories about celebrities who were of the same sex as the reader and roughly the same age to be more interesting than stories about people much older or younger than themselves. These findings were consistent with what one might expect if interest in gossip was motivated primarily by concerns about rivals.

In a second study, McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002) asked college students to read 12 gossip scenarios that revealed either positive news about an unidentified other (i.e., receiving a large inheritance, winning a major academic award, having a date with a famous person) or negative information about that individual (i.e., stealing, promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual dysfunction, sexual infidelity, gambling problems, academic cheating, terminal illness). The students were then asked to rank how interested they would be in finding out more about the situation and how likely they would be to pass this information along, depending on whether the person described in the gossip scenario was a professor, a friend, a relative, an acquaintance, or a stranger. The students in this study tended to be more interested in information about others of the same sex, and they were more likely to pass along negative information about potential adversaries (strangers, powerful others) and to protect negative information about allies (friends, relatives). On the other hand, positive information about non-allies was relatively uninteresting and was unlikely to be transmitted,

whereas positive information about allies would be shared enthusiastically. All of this is consistent with an evolutionary notion of gossip as a status-enhancing mechanism.

Given that most of the previous research on gossip has been concerned with the social-control functions of gossip and on what people talk about when they gossip, the present study is an attempt to replicate and extend the results of McAndrew and Milenkovic's (2002) study concerning how individuals engage in gossip-seeking behavior as a means of enhancing their own prospects in social competition. We utilize the methodology developed by McAndrew and Milenkovic whereby participants read short gossip scenarios that qualify as gossip. Some of these scenarios consist of positive information (e.g., inheriting a large sum of money), while others consist of negative information (e.g., cheating, drug abuse). People are then asked to rank their interest in and likelihood of passing on the information in the gossip scenario depending on whom the information was about.

McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002) divided the stimulus persons in their study into allies (i.e., relatives, friends) and non-allies (i.e., acquaintances, strangers, professors), but they did not include stimulus persons who were explicitly described as enemies or rivals, nor did they include romantic partners as stimulus persons. In our study, we include these new categories of individuals in an attempt to understand more completely the dynamics of gossip-seeking behavior. Furthermore, we also asked people to rank different types of stimulus persons regarding the likelihood that such persons would be the individuals with whom one would share the gossip in question. Based on the results of earlier research and on the evolutionary hypotheses developed by other investigators (e.g., Barkow, 1992), our study hypotheses are as follows:

> *Hypothesis 1.* For stimulus persons who are not lovers, participants will express the greatest interest in gossip about others of the same gender as themselves. Based on the results of earlier studies (i.e., McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002), this effect will be especially strong for females.

> *Hypothesis 2.* Participants will show greater interest in positive information about allies (e.g., friends, relatives) than in positive information about enemies or rivals.

> *Hypothesis 3.* Participants will be more likely to spread positive information about allies and negative information about enemies/rivals.

> *Hypothesis 4.* Participants will always be more likely to share gossip with allies than with non-allies.

Hypothesis 5. Romantic partners will usually be subjects of great interest for almost every scenario, but whether the gossip is spread will be highly dependent on the nature of the information.

Method

Participants

There were 140 participants (42 males, 98 females) who ranged in age from 17 to 23 years. All participants were undergraduate students at a small liberal arts college in the American Midwest.

Materials

Each participant received a page of written instructions followed by 12 hypothetical gossip scenarios. Each scenario was a brief (3 or 4 sentences in length) story about a fictitious person. The age and gender of the person were not specified in any of the stories. Each story provided personal information that would clearly qualify as gossip; that is, each scenario presented information of a highly personal nature that could be influential in the judgments that others would make about the character, reputation, or status of the individual in question. The themes of the scenarios in order of presentation are as follows: a large inheritance, stealing computers, promiscuity, a drug overdose, sexual dysfunction, sexual infidelity, a major academic award, drunken behavior, gambling problems, a terminal illness (leukemia), academic cheating, and dating a famous person. The scenarios used in this study are presented in the Appendix.

Procedure

Participants were instructed to read each scenario and to answer three questions about each one. The first question asked each participant to rank how likely he or she would be to seek out more information about the situation described in the scenario for 12 different types of people: male or female relatives, male or female professors, male or female acquaintances, male or female friends, and male or female strangers, as well as a same-sex enemy or rival and a romantic partner. For these 12 possibilities, a ranking of 1 was assigned to the person about whom participants would be *most likely* to seek more information, a ranking of 2 indicated the person about whom

they would be next most likely to seek information, and so on down to the person who was least interesting. That person would receive a ranking of 12. As all of the participants were college students, professors were included as a category in an attempt to present a high-status person whose behavior could affect the respondents.

The second question asked participants to rank how likely they would be to *pass along the information* in the story for each of the 12 types of individuals, using the same ranking system described previously. The third question asked participants to rank who they would be *most likely to tell the information to* using the same ranking system as the previous questions. At the beginning of the experiment, participants signed a consent form and reported their age and gender.

Results

The data obtained in this study were ordinal-level (ranked) data. Each participant ranked 12 hypothetical stimulus persons on three different questions in 12 different gossip scenarios. At first glance, it would seem as if the appropriate analysis would be to assess the extent to which participants' rankings were consistent across the different gossip scenarios. In this case, the appropriate statistical tool would be Kendall's coefficient of concordance (*W*; Lehman, 1991; Lindeman, Merenda, & Gold, 1980; McNemar, 1969). However, such an analysis would not provide the information needed to test the hypotheses proposed in this study. Knowing that participants' rankings were (or were not) in agreement across the different gossip scenarios would be irrelevant to the questions at hand. The real issue is which stimulus persons were being highly ranked most frequently (or least frequently) within each gossip scenario, and whether this varied according to the sex of the participant and the nature of the gossip represented in the scenario. For this type of analysis, a chi-square test of the frequency with which different stimulus persons achieved a top ranking was required.

Forcing participants to rank the stimulus persons was essentially a ruse to make them choose between people who might be potential targets of gossip. If we had simply asked participants to rate the stimulus persons on a Likert-type scale, it would have been too easy for them to express equal preferences for different stimulus persons or to adopt a mindless response set in which they simply checked one end of the scale or the other in order to complete the questionnaire quickly. The rationale for the ranking technique was to evoke more thoughtful and discriminating responses from participants, but the rankings themselves were never intended to be the objects of analysis. The conversion of ranked (ordinal) data to frequency (categorical) data is an accepted statistical procedure (Marascuilo & McSweeney, 1977), and one

that has been used successfully in other gossip research (e.g., McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002).

Thus, the frequencies with which different types of stimulus persons were selected as being most likely to have more information sought about them, most likely to be gossiped about, and most likely to be confided in were tallied and analyzed via chi-square tests for each scenario. These analyses reveal a significant difference in the frequency with which different types of people were ranked as being most likely to have information sought about them, most likely to be talked about, and most likely to be confided in for every scenario. Hence, the participants in this experiment were making consistent judgments as to whom they would *most like to hear gossip about*, whom they would be *most likely to spread gossip about*, and whom they would be *most likely to share gossip with*.

In the interest of readability, chi-square values and degrees of freedom will not be reported for all of the analyses that are to be discussed. The level of significance reflected by the chi-square values from each analysis will, however, be indicated. Given the large number of comparisons that were made and the fact that many of them were not derived from a priori predictions, a Bonferroni adjustment (Harris, 1985) indicated that a conservative criterion of $p < .001$ would be the most reasonable guideline to use when evaluating the likelihood that the reported differences are not the result of chance.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants (especially females) would express the greatest interest in gossip about others of the same sex as themselves. The test of this hypothesis was complicated by the fact that lovers/romantic partners were chosen so frequently as the person of primary interest in the gossip scenarios; and for most participants, the lover presumably would be a person of the opposite sex. The pattern of results exhibited by males and females regarding the sex of the person chosen as most interesting is displayed in Table 1. All of the findings described in this table were significant at a level of at least $p < .0001$.

As can be seen in Table 1, when the understandable exception of lovers/romantic partners is removed from the mix, participants expressed a clear-cut preference for gossip about same-sex others over opposite-sex others. There was not a single gossip scenario in which an opposite-sex individual was judged to be more interesting than a same-sex individual. In fact, there was one gossip scenario (involving academic cheating) in which both males and females were significantly more interested in getting information about same-sex others than about their own romantic partners.

Table 1

Stimulus Person Chosen as the Person About Whom Participants Most Wanted to Hear Gossip

Gossip scenario	Most interest in lovers, followed by same-sex others	Equal interest in lovers and same-sex others	Most interest in same-sex others, followed by lovers	Most interest in lovers, no preference after that
1. Large inheritance	Males and Females			
2. Computer theft		Males and Females		
3. Promiscuity	Males and Females			
4. Drug abuse	Males only	Females only		
5. Sexual dysfunction	Males only	Females only		
6. Sexual infidelity	Males and Females			
7. Academic award	Males and Females			
8. Drunken behavior	Females only	Males only		
9. Gambling problem		Males and Females		
10. Leukemia		Females only		Males only
11. Academic cheating			Males and Females	
12. Dating a famous person	Females only			Males only

In summary, the results clearly show that if the person being gossiped about is not one's own romantic partner, there is a very strong predisposition to be more interested in news about same-sex versus opposite-sex people. The data further suggest that females, more often than males, will find same-sex others as interesting as their own lovers, as there were five gossip scenarios in which females were equally interested in lovers and other women, but only three in which males showed equal interest.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that participants would show greater interest in positive information about allies than in positive information about non-allies and enemies/rivals. There are three gossip scenarios that were clearly positive in nature: receiving a large inheritance, winning a major academic award, and dating a movie star. For each of these scenarios, the pattern of responses was the same. In each case, participants were significantly most interested in knowing this information about a lover ($p < .0001$). For gossip about a large inheritance, relatives were a distant but significant second, $\chi^2(6, N = 140) = 298.40$, $p < .0001$. Friends were second-most interesting when it came to news about dating a movie star, $\chi^2(6, N = 140) = 297.30$, $p < .0001$; and friends and relatives were equally interesting (after lovers; $p > .05$) when it came to winning a major academic award. In all of these scenarios, strangers, professors, acquaintances, and rivals were named significantly less often than lovers, relatives, or friends ($p < .001$).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that participants would be more likely to spread positive information about allies and negative information about enemies/rivals. Participants were most likely to spread gossip about an individual receiving a large inheritance if that person was a lover, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 100.20$, $p < .0001$. Friends, relatives, and rivals placed a distant second and were not significantly different from each other ($p > .05$). News about winning an academic award was also more likely to be spread about lovers, with friends and relatives a distant but significant second, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 293.60$, $p < .0001$.

When it came to dating a movie star, people were significantly more likely to spread the gossip about friends, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 90.40$, $p < .0001$, followed equally by lovers and relatives ($p > .05$). (This news was probably not considered "good" if it involved one's romantic partner!) Thus, the information presented in the positive gossip scenarios was overwhelmingly more likely to be transmitted if it concerned an individual whom one might consider to be an ally.

Spreading negative news was another matter entirely. On all nine of the negative gossip scenarios, an enemy/rival was chosen as the person most likely to be talked about, and in none of these scenarios did any other category of stimulus person even come close ($p < .0001$). In fact, there was only one scenario in which a second category of persons was named significantly more often than anyone else, and that occurred when professors were a significant second choice when it came to spreading news about academic cheating, $\chi^2(6, 139) = 342.84$, $p < .0001$. Collectively, our results confirm that we are most likely to spread positive information about allies and to spread negative information about rivals.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that participants would always be more likely to share gossip with allies than with non-allies. For all 12 gossip scenarios, lovers and friends were chosen by everyone as the persons with whom they would be most likely to share gossip ($p < .0001$). Surprisingly, even relatives were significantly lower than both friends and lovers in every scenario except one (i.e., a person with leukemia), in which relatives and friends were chosen equally often after lovers ($p > .05$).

Although everyone chose to confide first in lovers and friends, females reported a stronger preference for sharing gossip with their friends than did males. For example, males were significantly more likely to share gossip with lovers than with friends on 9 of the 12 scenarios ($p < .001$). Females, on the other hand, only chose lovers over friends in one of the gossip scenarios, and reported that they would be equally likely to tell lovers and friends about the gossip in 11 of the 12 scenarios ($p > .05$). In all scenarios, both males and females were more likely to share gossip with same-sex friends than with opposite-sex friends ($p < .001$).

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 predicted that romantic partners would usually be subjects of great interest, but whether gossip was spread about them would be highly dependent on the nature of the information. As significant others, it seemed reasonable to assume that news about romantic partners would always be of interest. The results confirm this, as information about lovers was selected as being of greatest interest ($p < .0001$) in every gossip scenario except for academic cheating, where news about rivals was most interesting, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 186.80$, $p < .0001$.

There were only three scenarios in which lovers were chosen as the people most likely to be gossiped about, and these involved news about receiving a

large inheritance, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 100.20$, $p < .0001$; winning a major academic award, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 293.60$, $p < .0001$; and suffering from leukemia, $\chi^2(6, 139) = 60.97$, $p < .0001$. Thus, while information about romantic partners was always of great interest, they were not usually the people most likely to be gossiped about, especially if the gossip was negative in nature.

Exploratory Analyses

We did not propose specific hypotheses about whom we would most want to know negative information. From a fitness perspective, it could be equally important to know bad things about one's allies and one's enemies, but it was not clear which would be judged as more important. Our results proved to be quite interesting in this regard, and these results can be seen through a re-examination of Table 1.

Both males and females expressed greatest interest in negative information about lovers when the issue involved promiscuity, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 298.80$, $p < .0001$; sexual infidelity, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 403.30$, $p < .0001$; and dating a famous person, $\chi^2(6, 140) = 297.30$, $p < .0001$, all situations that are directly relevant to the partner's trustworthiness in a romantic relationship. Males were also most interested in romantic partners if the gossip concerned drug abuse, sexual dysfunction, or leukemia ($p < .0001$), but in these scenarios, females were equally interested in news about lovers and same-sex rivals ($p > .05$). Male and female participants were equally interested in gossip about lovers and same-sex rivals when it involved stealing computers and gambling problems ($p > .05$). When it came to knowing about drunken behavior, females were most interested in knowing about lovers, and males were equally interested in lovers and same-sex friends and rivals. Finally, as we noted earlier, both males and females were most interested in news about same-sex rivals if the gossip in question involved academic cheating.

Discussion

In general, the results of this experiment were consistent with the hypotheses. Romantic partners aside, people tended to be most interested in information about others of the same sex as themselves, and they showed much greater interest in positive information about allies than in positive information about enemies or rivals. Our participants also indicated a greater willingness to transmit positive information about their allies and to spread negative information about their rivals. Overwhelmingly, our participants said that gossip would be shared with allies, rather than with non-allies. Finally, romantic partners were indeed the people our participants were most

interested in keeping track of, but it was only in very select circumstances that lovers would be the subject of gossip shared with others.

The structure of the gossip networks revealed in our research was what might be expected if gossip serves as an individual status-enhancing mechanism, as well as a social-control mechanism. This reinforces the conclusions of the few previous studies (e.g., McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002) demonstrating that gossip does indeed function in accord with the selfish interests of individuals and does not always serve the interests of the group as a whole. The key is that individuals are always interested in the most exploitable information. Dishonest or irresponsible behavior is most likely to be used against our rivals or against relevant high-status people (e.g., professors engaged in academic cheating), while news about the good fortune of such people is ignored. Conversely, good news about our friends and lovers is not only interesting, but it is likely to be trumpeted far and wide to the advantage of the individual who is spreading the news.

The data obtained in this experiment also confirm the importance of same-sex friends in our lives (Shackelford, 1997). Women, in particular, appear to be interested in the activities of other women. They were three times as likely as men to be as interested in gossip about same-sex others as they were in gossip about their own lovers. In most cases, they were just as likely to share gossip with their same-sex friends as with their lovers. Men, on the other hand, were much more likely to confide in romantic partners than in their male friends.

The pattern of interest shown in different types of gossip about different types of people also closely followed the patterns one would expect if gossip is ultimately about enhancing reproductive fitness. Information about sexual activities and health was most interesting when it concerned romantic partners. Information about cheaters that was potentially damaging to the reputation and integrity of an individual was most prized when it involved same-sex rivals. The clearest example of this in our study was the intense interest both males and females had in scandalous news about the academic integrity of their rivals. Given that all of our participants were college students, this information would have clear competitive relevance in an academic environment.

In summary, continued research on gossip from an evolutionary perspective holds great promise for helping us to understand the dynamics of human gossip networks, as well as a variety of other related social phenomena. However, if some day we are to conclude confidently that we have learned something important about human nature, much of this research will need to be done in a cross-cultural context. Given the variability of human behavior across cultures, it is essential to replicate the results of studies, such as the one

described in this article, in non-Western settings. Only then can we truly be comfortable talking about gossip as something that comes as naturally to human beings as does breathing.

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Appendix

Gossip Scenarios

1. A person's wealthy grandfather has recently died. This individual was named the sole recipient of his inheritance. The person now has over a million dollars in stocks, savings, and property.

2. Computers have been stolen from various areas of campus. The thief was caught by officials while attempting to sell them out of state. Someone who works in the dean's office tells you who it was, and offers to tell you why the thief took them.

3. Your friend starts telling you stories about an individual who has had sex with so many people in the area that there is no one left to meet. Your friend begins talking about the various pick-up lines and sleazy techniques used.

4. At the beginning of class one Monday, you overhear someone talking about a huge drug party that took place over the weekend. As you strain to listen, you discover that someone almost over-dosed on a combination of cocaine, LSD, and marijuana.

5. An individual has tried, but failed many times, at sustaining romantic relationships. After a short time, the person is always alone and searching for someone new. A friend informs you that it has to do with the person's inability to have sexual intercourse.

6. A few of your friends were hanging out at Cherry Street (a well-known local bar) on a Friday night, and they noticed two people flirting. While your friends were walking home, they saw the two entering a hotel room. One of the two has been in a serious relationship for several years.

7. The highest academic award one can receive in this country is being given to an individual at Knox. This person has worked long and hard on their research and is well deserving of such an honor.

8. Walking back from Café Java one night, you see a drunk person stumbling around outside walking from one bar to another. Your friend, a bartender at one of the bars, tells you that the individual comes in to drink every day and was recently arrested for driving while intoxicated.

9. Sports events are very popular events for gambling. While watching a game on TV, your friend comments on somebody who has been gambling a lot recently and is having financial difficulty.

10. A friend mentions that he is on the way to the hospital. After you ask what for, he tells you he is visiting an individual with leukemia. The person has taken a turn for the worse and is not expected to survive much longer.

11. There is an individual continually portraying themselves as more intelligent than others. You find out that this person has cheated their way through school and falsified academic credentials.

12. While traveling to Chicago one weekend, someone met a famous movie star. For a few months now, the two have been spending time together and have recently started dating.